INTERDISCIPLINARY ISSUES IN PUBLIC SPEAKING: PRELIMINARY REFLECTIONS ON ENTREPRENEURS' EXPERIENCE

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Abstract:
This contribution underlines how relevant interdisciplinarity and discourse contamination are in a 'hybrid' and/or 'contaminated' field of research and practice such as 'the public speaking domain'. The paper focuses on how entrepreneurs make sense of public speaking within their professional arena. Two different but complementary areas of study, namely linguistics and organisational behaviour, find here a common ground and share the same final objective, that is: investigating the way the pathos of public speaking varies according to business roles (e.g. sales person, buyer, consultant, etc.).
This study is based on a small study conducted in seventeen Italian SMEs. The sample is made up by 17 entrepreneurs running international firms in industries such as marble stone, steel, and waste recycling. The study takes a subjectivist, interpretivist stance as it is concerned with the way individuals portray their understanding and experiences through the social construction of meanings. The originality of this paper stands in the fact that the Authors look at public speaking, rather than public speech per se, adopting an entrepreneurship multi-disciplinary perspective, attempting to shed light on aspects not clearly identifiable by using more traditional lenses.

Key Words: Interdisciplinarity, public speaking, entrepreneurship, entrepreneurial pathos

Introduction

Modern public speaking draws its origins from the British School of elocutionists, among which we underline the importance of Sheridan (1762). He theorized the existence of two types of language, namely the 'language of ideas' and the 'language of emotions'. While the former enables speakers to manifest the thoughts which pass in their minds, the latter enables them to communicate to the audience the effects those thoughts have on their minds. By using those two types of language, in Sheridan's view the office of a public speaker is to instruct, to please and to move. The British School used those principles of elocution in investigative treaties, and for writing manuals for technical elocution (e.g. clerical elocution) and illustrative anthologies. The power of oratory, eloquence and effective speech became central at the beginning of the 20th century thanks to the efforts of the American Elocutionary Movement (Zanola, 2002). With the American tradition the relevance of effective speech expanded to the fields of medicine (e.g. lectures) and entertainment (e.g. theatre). Desire for education and the wish to be entertained contributed to the American elocutionists' success. Many people, often trained for professions such as medicine or the theatre, became 'teachers of elocution' in response to a growing demand for training in this field. Though, it was with Dale Carnegie (1913) that oratory and eloquence started to be considered applicable to the business domain from a pragmatic point of view. Notwithstanding the modern perspective that developed from the 19th century onwards, the basic components of public speaking still preserve elements of the classical tradition elaborated by highly regarded Roman orators such as Cicero and Quintilian. Invention, arrangement, style, memory and delivery (Covino and Jolliffe, 1995) and the characteristics of correctness, clarity, elegance and accuracy are still considered important canons of modern public

speaking. The studies that focused on public speaking both from a rhetorical perspective (Strike 1994; Lucas 1998; Coopman and Lull 2008; Kumar 2005; Esenwein 2009) and from a political and conversation analysis perspective (Atkinson 1984; Hammond 1993; Nielsen 2004) keep in consideration these traditional components.

In Business, the importance of public speaking has been acknowledged extensively by authors as, to name a few, Knapp (1969), Myers and Kessler (1980), Ober et al. (1999), Brooker Thro (2009), Cyphert (2010). Their studies emphasize aspects that span from the role of public speaking for successful business practices all the way to the rhetorical aspects that characterize business speech; and from the key themes that emerged from corporate leaders speeches all the way to the effects of certainty (e.g. profit status, industry type) on public business communication outcomes. While extant literature has paid attention to the constituents of the public speech *per se* and to the nuances it takes when deployed for business objectives, little emerges on the way speaking in public is interpreted by those who perform it, and on the extent to which its performance serves a wider range of purposes rather than those strictly linked to business. In attempting to fill this gap in an interdisciplinary perspective, this study looks at the way entrepreneurs, as a particular category of 'business men', understand and explain public speaking within their professional arena.

1. Interdisciplinarity and *contamination* in applied linguistics: a definition

Interdisciplinarity is a concept widely applied to recent approaches to public speaking in business communication (Zanola 2012), where financial specialized discourse matches with oral fluency and competence in discourses that require both financial and linguistic experience. The 'public speaking' genre is an interesting example of a 'contaminated area' of study: the word *contamination* is widely used in medicine, chemistry, biology and music but has been applied more recently to the linguistic and literary area (Hartmann/Stork 1972; Matthews 1997; Pei/Gaynor 1954). In manuscript tradition, for example, it is considered as a blending whereby a single manuscript contains readings originating from different sources or different lines of tradition. In literature, contamination refers to a blending of legends or stories that results in new combinations of incident or in modifications of plot. In linguistics, the word takes different connotations according to its area of usage, namely among phonetics and phonology, syntax, and semantics. The public speaking domain is among the most hybrid, heterogeneous and 'contaminated' genre.

Our short contribution is aimed at describing a new productive and rich area for interdisciplinary research, trying to underlying some new perspectives of analysis, which could be useful to both linguists and business experts.

1.1. Interdisciplinarity

The nature of any interdisciplinarian activity was analyzed in a complex phylosophical context by Finkental (2001), who concluded his book entitled *Interdisciplinarity: toward the definition of a metadiscipline?* by declaring that interdisciplinarity may at times be very successful, even though many interdisciplinarian activities lead to confusion and deep antagonisms between different cultures. Interdisciplinarity as a metadiscipline seems still to be defined.

In a more recent overview of the problem - applied to the academic research and practice -, Orland underlined that most academic research is conducted within a single traditional academic discipline or sub-discipline, with the researcher working alone or with one or two colleagues.

> This structure is functional for the continued development and growth of academic fields and sub-fields, as well as for rewarding individual researcher productivity. However, it is not well-aligned with the nature of most problems which require knowledge expertise from multiple disciplines and therefore disciplinary collaborations involving many researchers and research traditions (Orland 2009: 118)

Analysing public speaking in business contexts requires interdisciplinarity. We are underlining here the paucity of usable analytical frameworks in the field and we hope we will

contribute to develop relevant interdisciplinary analyses of language, which may turn the insights of linguists into comprehensible and usable forms.

1.2. Contamination

When referring to new and current models of genres and subgenres, the adjective 'contaminated' is often used (Zanola 2011). 'Contamination' is sometimes used in linguistics to refer to hybrid texts. Leonard Bloomfield declared its relevance in linguistics many decades ago, and in more than one field of linguistic studies. As for phonetics, for example (Bloomfield 1933: 423) :

Psychologists have ascertained that under laboratory conditions, the stimulus of hearing a word like 'four' often leads to the utterance a word like 'five' – but this, after all, does not account for contamination. There is perhaps more relevance in the fact that contaminative "slips of the tongue" are not infrequent. (Example: I'll just GRUN (GO plus RUN) over and get it)

In syntax,

Innovations (…) sometimes have a contaminative aspect. The type "I am friends with him" and "We are friends". Irregularities such as the "attraction" of relative pronouns seem to be of this nature.

As for semantics, So-called popular etymologies are largely adaptive or contaminative. An irregular or semantically obscure form is replaced by a new form of more normal structure and some semantic content (…). Thus, an old SHAM-FAST 'shame-fast', that is, 'modest', has given way to the regular, but semantically queer compound SHAME-FACED.

In principle, contamination means here 'adaptation' (Bloomfield 1933: 521), as widely recognized in the literature (Hartmann & Stork 1972: 51; Hock 1986: 197-198; Lehmann 1992: 223-224; Matthews 1997: 72; Nash 1968: 43; Pei & Gaynor 1954: 47). We will not take into consideration here non-literary meanings of the word, such as 'illness', or 'pollution'. By 'contaminated genre' this paper refers to the hybrid nature of public speeches, which may be considered as a blending of varied and multiple competencies. Business speakers (namely, entrepreneurs in our research) face many difficult complexities, because the situations about which they speak are often ambiguous, depending also on different perspectives. When the speaking process itself is complex because of genre expectations or collaborative project requirements, the speaker faces additional challenges. The genre may privilege or constrain choices in style, organization, scope, and content.

2. Entrepreneurs' public speaking

The research on entrepreneurs' public speaking offers a limited range of specific contributions. Studies in the field tend to highlight either the technical skills required for successful public speaking in business, or the symbolic aspects that entrepreneurs evoke for their speeches to be persuasive. Studies that reflect the former trend focus on the nature of oratorical skills and on the possibility of transferring those skills from political oratory to the management community, to which entrepreneurs are loosely associated by this tradition. Within this stream Greatbatch and Clark (2005) stated how "oratorical skills are universal regardless of the context within which a speech is given" (Greatbatch and Clark, 2005, p. 12). Despite acknowledging the importance of studies of this nature for deepening the understanding of public speaking in the management community, we must consider that the figure of the entrepreneur is quite peculiar compared to that of the manager. Without intending to expand into entrepreneurship literature, we provide a key definition aimed at illustrating what characterizes entrepreneurs. A distinctive feature of entrepreneurs is that they are part of the "complex process of new venture creation... [the entrepreneur] is viewed in terms of activities undertaken to enable the organization to come into existence" (Gartner, 1988, p.57). This particular feature can embed risk-taking (Brockhaus, 1980), belief of being in control (Brockhaus, 1982), need for achievement (McClelland, 1965), strong creative tendency (Ward, 2004) and need for autonomy (Hornaday and Aboud, 1971) all aspects that specifically characterize the figure of the entrepreneur. Drawing on those considerations, a more focused reflection on the impact of oratorical skills on entrepreneurs has been provided by Putnam and Fairhurst (2001). These two authors reflect on the institutional legitimacy of entrepreneurs from a sociolinguistic point of view. In particular, they argue

that entrepreneurs' speech embeds cultural codes that appeal to the public legitimizing their role. The recurrence to such codes manages the impression that the entrepreneur portrays to the audience. Oratorical skills have also been associated with entrepreneurs' success (e.g. recognition of a successful opportunity, successful exploitation of an opportunity). In particular, in their study on the embodied metaphors in the speech and gestures of entrepreneurs, Cienki, Cornelissen and Clarke (2008) argue that entrepreneurs' speech tends to evoke experiences particular to the life and situation of the speaker. This, in turn, makes arguments persuasive to relevant others (e.g. employees, prospective investors). Drawing on those conclusions, Cornelissen and Clarke (2010) also suggest that "individual entrepreneurs use certain forms of speech – specifically, analogy and metaphor – to induce an opportunity for a novel venture" (Cornelissen and Clarke, 2010, p. 539) and to establish shared understanding, support and legitimacy. These two authors conceptualize how language and thought interpenetrate in context and how the meaning entrepreneurs want to share is a result of interactions with others.

Notwithstanding the attention paid to the role of public speech when looking at entrepreneurs, extant research does not clarify how entrepreneurs interpret the actual speaking in public and whether, by using this form of communication, they only aim to achieve support and legitimacy or to portray other aspects of their profession. With this in mind, our paper aims to address the following research question: what meaning do entrepreneurs attribute to speaking in public within the context of their role, and with what implications? Before illustrating the data we collected, in the next section we discuss the context in which we conducted our research as well as the methodological underpinnings that inspired it.

3. Research context and methodology

Our study was conducted at the end of 2010 in seventeen Northern Italian SMEs (Mercado, Welford and Prescott 2004) operating in various sectors, namely: automotive, steel, marble, cosmetics, waste recycling, renewable energies, financial/insurance, marketing and communication, services, textile, stationery, jewellery, luxury goods, and food. Ten of the SMEs in our sample are based in Lombardia while seven are based in Veneto. All of the businesses in our sample export outside Italy.

We adopt an interpretive and qualitative approach. Careful attention was given to the uniqueness of the research experience and to the richness of the data that we collected. The inductive approach made it necessary to interpret and analyse new conceptual elements while they were emerging. The empirical research aimed at emphasizing the ways in which individuals interpret their social world (Bryman 2008). The case study design enabled us to investigate our research problem paying attention to the role of the setting in understanding the phenomenon in question (Yin, 1994; Eisendhardt, 1989). We chose a mix of convenience and snowball sampling (Bryman, 2008). The former enabled us to select people on the basis of their availability, while the latter enabled us to make initial contact with a small group of people who were relevant to our research topic and then used this to establish contact with others (Bryman 2008). We carried out seventeen semi-structured interviews within the seventeen SMEs in our sample, for the duration of no less than one hour each, for a total amount of about thirty hours of recorded data. We interviewed the owners, all women, of every firm without facing any major access issue, apart from needing to reschedule the interview date because of the busy diaries of our interviewees. Interviews were carried out in Italian as this made our interviewees more relaxed. Subsequently, interview extracts were translated into English, reflecting as carefully as possible expressions, words and meanings actors portrayed in their accounts. We drew on both Halai's (2007) and Hernandez's (2010) contributions to carry out the transcription, translation and transliteration of the interviews in an accurate way. The final translated material resulted into a transmuted text that reflected the original although it had been recreated. Interviewees' names have been omitted to ensure anonymity. The table in Appendix provides details on the age of our interviewees and on the size, year of foundation, sector and region in which every company operates.

Appendix - Sample Information

Interview sequence number	Interviewee's age	N. of employees working in the company	Year of foundation	Sector	Region
1	59	20	1990	Automotive	Lomb.
2	56	30	1989	Marketing and Communication	Lomb.
3	50	100	1960	Steel	Lomb.
4	55	50	1969	Cosmetics	Lomb.
5	32	200	1950	Steel	Lomb.
6	39	20	1774	Luxury goods	Lomb.
7	45	25	1987	Waste recycling	Lomb.
8	46	200	1950	Marble	Lomb.
9	54	50	1970	Financial Services	Lomb.
10	45	20	1989	Financial Services	Lomb.
11	42	30	1990	Clothing	Lomb.
12	52	35	1992	Financial Services	Veneto
13	47	40	1985	Food	Veneto
14	60	42	1986	Food	Veneto
15	65	100	1950	Textile	Lomb.
16	51	38	1995	Cosmetics	Veneto
17	35	12	2001	Food	Lomb.

The approach to data analysis draws on the research of Lofland and Lofland (1995) and Bryman (2008) with regard to general coding of our qualitative data. We also followed Ryan and Bernard's (2003) recommendations paying particular attention to repetitions, indigenous typologies or categories, metaphors and analogies, transitions, similarities and differences, linguistic connectors, missing data and theory-related material. This approach provided us with some pointers for organizing our analysis. In terms of the validity and reliability of our study, we refer to LeCompte and Goetz (1982) whose seminal work clarifies the different priorities qualitative researches have compared to quantitative ones in terms of those issues. From the validity perspective, apart from continuously adjusting the constructs while carrying out the study, we aimed to data accuracy by routinely asking for clarification during the interviews themselves. We aimed at focusing on the sense of what each interviewee said. We were particularly alert in asking every time what exactly words used in the workplace everydayness meant to them, also avoiding attributing our own meaning to those words. Moreover, specific feedback sessions were carried out by the research team in order to categorize the data.

4. Findings

For understanding the way entrepreneurs interpret public speaking within the context of their role and the implications that derive from it, firstly, we looked at what our interviewees meant by this form of communication and in what settings they used it; secondly, we looked at what exactly characterized it, according to our participants' accounts. To provide examples of those trends we used our participants' interview extracts. The purpose of this section is to illustrate some of the data we collected. Our interdisciplinary reflections on the data corpus will be highlighted in the 'conclusion' section.

5. Speaking in public: what it is and in what settings it occurs

Following we highlight some of the quotes in which interviewees specify what they mean by public speaking. One of our study participants who owns a waste recycling company, explains:

> For me public speaking is the way an entrepreneur addresses his or her audience. This audience can be characterized by a group of clients, a group of people that join her same professional association, her employees, her investors...

A similar definition was provided by another interviewee who owns a steel company. He suggests:

> When I talk about entrepreneur's public speaking I refer to the way we talk when we have to get a message across to our colleagues, employees or clients.

Also another entrepreneur operating in the steel sector who took part in our study, clarifies:

> It is wrong to think that public speaking takes place only if a person addresses a large audience. In my opinion speaking in public is when I try to get a message across to people in a board meeting, or in a team meeting, or when I communicate with a group of employees or even when I am invited to talk about my company by voluntary associations, for example. All of these settings represent the arena for... eh eh eh... entrepreneur's public speaking.

The owner of a textile company, makes a similar point with regard to the size and variety of the audience:

> In my experience public speaking happens either when I address a limited number of people at one given time… and this can occur in meetings with clients, Union representatives, employees… or when I address a large class of university students.

A more extensive explanation on when to refer to public speaking is provided by the owner of a Marble company:

> Neither the size nor the type of the audience define the situations when we can refer to public speaking... My view is that this occurs when you talk to the stockholders' assembly as well as when you address three employees. In the past, public speaking was associated to politicians or lawyers... emh... I think that that wasn't accurate. Public speaking happens every time that you have a point, a message that you want to get across to a group of people, from three all the way to one thousand, you know what I mean?

According to all the sample participants public speaking is not defined by the size of the audience; rather it is about getting a message across to an audience that can vary in size but also in nature. An entrepreneur in the cosmetics sector, takes this point forward by mentioning the importance of speaking to key people rather than to great numbers. In her words:

> You see, I think that a public speech has to be studied, prepared, thought and build ad hoc. It has to achieve the company's selling objective, disregarding the number of people that constitute the audience. Even a public speech addressed to two or three key people can have a decisive role in the success and pursuit of the company's objective.

In our interviewees' accounts the settings in which public speaking can occur vary from those internal to the organization (e.g. board meetings, team meetings) to those external to it (e.g. universities, voluntary associations). After learning about how our sample participants define public speaking as well as the variety of settings in which they use it, we moved on to explore what, in their views, characterized this form of communication. In the next section we illustrate some quotes that addressed our interest on those matters.

6. What characterizes public speaking according to the sample participants

In terms of the elements characterizing public speaking our interviewees referred to its key components, such as speech construction (opening, body, closing of the speech; working outline, formal outline, key-word outline), delivery (body language; visual aids), and argumentation

(informative vs. persuasive speaking; patterns of reasoning; developing evidence and proofs). The importance of those aspects was underlined by all the interviewees. For example, the delivery component was considered significant. All interviewees agreed in giving a transitory and temporary role to their background in public speaking; admitting at the same time that, in spite of that, oral communication for their professional purposes is permanent or, at least, has a permanent effect on the listener. This is how an entrepreneur in the automotive sector, frames the component of delivery:

> Delivery is crucial in public speaking. I think of it as a music, a tune. I carry in my mind the music that I want to play and then my voice... the metaphors I use... my gestures... all these things become fundamental. These things enable me to deliver my tune. Delivering a public speech is also about setting the rhythm, the tempo, the pauses, the silences... it's a music. Sometimes I speak on the basis of a music that I have written beforehand, while some other times I just improvise... but even when I improvise, it's always on the basis of the music that I feel inside, that I have in my mind, and that I want the audience to learn.

As hinted in the above quote, voice and gestures are a fundamental tool. Interviewees revealed that these aspects are important for fighting against the irreversible timed nature of the oral messages. In our sample effectiveness in oral communication in general, and in business communication in particular, might be compromised unless it is combined with variations in the speaker's voice and body movements. This is how another sample participant, an entrepreneur operating in the food sector, explains the relevance of voice and gestures in public speaking:

> Speaking in public is like showing to others a path that only I know well. A path of which I know the end, I know where it takes. It's a path on which I have to take the audience... of course the extent to which I deviate from it is related to the type of feeling I create with the public... and I can create the right feeling not only with my message but also with my voice, my gestures. These elements are crucial for getting my point across, for showing the way to my audience, for ensuring the effectiveness of my speech. The right tone of voice, the right gestures... I mean the most appropriate ones for that particular type of message... all of those things impress, stamp the message in people's memory... the audience will remember.

In addition to the components of public speech (e.g argumentation, delivery), interviewees highlighted a second set of elements they illustrated as important in the entrepreneur's way of addressing an audience, namely: sense of welcoming, emotions and emotion transfer, emphasis on people, spontaneity, self-confidence, and the search for audience's confirmation. Following there are some vivid and energetic examples of how our sample participants illustrated their views on this subject. This is how the owner of a financial services company emphasizes the role of persuasion in argumentation:

> The speech deals with economic and normative issues and audience persuasion is its purpose. In my public speeches I always start from normative texts which represent my point of reference; then I explain and spread those contents to the audience (even to those audiences with no experience in the field). If the audience reacts as I would have wanted, then it means that my speech worked, my argumentation worked. One can be more persuasive by aiming to the interpersonal and emotional aspect.

One of our interviewees that owns and runs a marketing and communication company, argues that:

> Entrepreneur's public speaking is strongly characterized by a sense of welcoming that is often underestimated. When we talk, this sense, this spirit of welcoming reaches our audience... moreover, entrepreneurs have to show their concern for people, the importance of people and their contribution to the organization.

From a similar perspective, a study participant who owns a financial company explains the presence of emotions in public speaking:

> Entrepreneurs let their emotions emerge from their speeches. When I talk I transfer all the passion I have for my profession and for my business to my public. These emotions enable me to be impressive. The leverage that are commonly advertised as typical of entrepreneurs speeches for catching the audience are just too general... competition, challenge… you know what I mean. Do we have to conform to those aspects to be effective in getting our message across as entrepreneurs? Says who?

Another interviewee who works in the financial sector, too, illustrates the characteristics of self-confidence and self-esteem:

> I believe that entrepreneur's public speaking is characterized by the presence of self-confidence and self-esteem. The background knowledge is important but showing that you are convinced of what you're talking about makes the speech more effective. The audience perceives the content of the message but also, and mostly, the spirit that inspires it. This spirit reaches the emotional sphere, directly. It involves the listener. Even if listeners disagree with the argument they still perceive how important that is for the speaker and in general how important it is to acknowledge it, to discuss it, to talk about it.

With regard to the aspects of spontaneity and constant search for audience's confirmation as well as control, an entrepreneur operating in the steel sector explains:

> I have to say that spontaneity and search for audience confirmation are the aspects that characterize entrepreneur's public speaking. Spontaneity is driven by the passion of being an entrepreneur, of believing in one's venture… at the same time the reaction that comes from the audience channels the way one sends the message.

Conclusion

We have illustrated the findings related to our interviewees' accounts on what public speaking is, in what settings it occurs and what characterizes this type of communication. Our aim was understanding the way entrepreneurs make sense of public speaking keeping in mind that the uniqueness of individuals' social context was an influential factor in the creation and development of our interviewees' accounts. The key aspects shown in our data suggest that for our sample participants public speaking is about getting a point across, sharing a rhythm, showing a path to others, creating a feeling, persuading, welcoming, and transferring passion for one's profession. At a first glance these points can be seen as consistent with the general canons associated to the role of a public speaker noted earlier in the paper. Though, we would look at this from a different perspective arguing that, if linked to the entrepreneur, each of those key aspects reflects the passion and the emotional component embedded in this role. Rather than exclusively considering entrepreneurs' use of oratorical skills (Cienki, Cornelissen and Clarke, 2008; Cornelissen and Clarke, 2010) and the importance they attribute to the normative component of a text - which we still acknowledge as important – we suggest reflecting on how actually just the fact of being an entrepreneur gives a specific pathos to public speaking which is different from that that any other speaker in a different role would give to this type of communication. The emotion that drives the entrepreneur as a risk-taker, as a person in control, as a person with a strong creative tendency, and as a person in need for autonomy reflects on his/her interpretation of public speaking, thus, turning this type of communication into a medium for sharing a path, a rhythm and ultimately a passion.

This view can suggest that for entrepreneurs public speaking may not only be about transferring a message or legitimizing one's position; it can also be about moving into the audience the same feeling that animates them. The latter might not be a mere means to the end of winning the interlocutors' trust and understanding but a way for sharing the entrepreneurial passion per se. There are two implications that emerge from this reflection. The first one is that, within the wide arena of business, the speaker's professional role influences the pathos associated to the performance of public speaking. In turn, this sets the emotional antecedent of the process of construction of meaning between the speaker and his/her audience during a speech. Drawing from the professional role, we believe that this type of antecedent is different from both the actual emotion that the speaker feels right before starting a speech and that may influence the outcome of it (on this matter extant literature

has widely explored the issue of public speaking as a fearful social situation, and of emotion regulation behaviours aimed at reducing anxiety and the occurrence of fearful thoughts experienced by the speaker while performing the speech - Pertaub, Slater and Barker, 2002; Hofman and Marten-DiBartolo, 2000; Egloff et al. 2008; Bodie, 2010) and the traditional rhetorical appeal to emotion that speakers use to win their audience. Particularly we would argue that, weather it is deliberate or not on the side of the speaker, the emotional antecedent we are referring to relates to enduring together with the audience the interpretation of one's professional role.

The second implication that emerges from our reflection on entrepreneurs and public speaking has a more pragmatic unfold and is addressed to public speaking trainers. Traditionally, the main aspects for training people in public speaking tend to focus on managing visual contact, managing the speaker's emotions, structuring the message effectively, developing personal charisma, and using gestures and non-verbal behaviour coherently (Osborn et al., 2008; Lukas, 2007; Ekman, 2003). Targeting those strategies in light of trainees' professional roles can increase the salience of the training outcomes making the benefits of the training activity fit for purpose.

Research challenges and suggestions for future research

Our findings are based on in-depth data from a small sample and pertain to Italian entrepreneurs; the implications of aspects such as gender, age, family background would require further research to identify. Exponents of case study research (Yin 1994) suggest that it is not the purpose of this research design to generalize to other cases or to populations beyond the case (Bryman 2008, p. 57). However, it is suspected that some elements of it are likely to be representative of the experiences of individuals within similar contexts. The reflections that emerge from our paper may suggest investigating the way the pathos of public speaking varies according to other business roles (e.g. sales person, buyer, consultant, etc.).

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